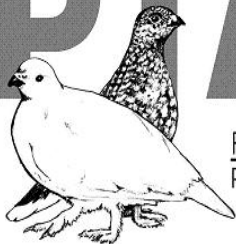


# PTARMIGAN



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Promoting the appreciation, conservation, and restoration of ecosystems,  
focusing on birds and other wildlife, through education, participation, stewardship, and advocacy.

April 2013

Volume 44, Issue 4

## **"Why the Galapagos Matters"**

**Presented by: Eric DeFonso, Naturalist, Birder, and Bird-Sound Recordist**

**Thursday, April 11, 2013**

**Fort Collins Senior Center—1200 Raintree Drive, Fort Collins**

**Social Gathering: 7 p.m.—Program : 7:30 p.m.**

Very few places in the world spark our imaginations in the way that the Galapagos does. This smattering of volcanic islands several hundred miles offshore of South America are well known worldwide by name. Few, however, have been able to visit the islands personally and understand why this rather desolate place, a place that Darwin himself compared to "the cultivated parts of the Infernal regions," has become so prominent not just as a tourist destination, but as a symbol of intellectual progress. In April 2011, northern Colorado birding regular Eric DeFonso spent 11 days in the Galapagos in the midst of his year-long journey through tropical South America. While there, he took photographs, made sound recordings, and marveled at the wonder of these evocative tropical, yet often desolate islands, a place that simultaneously felt like both the center of the world and its most far-flung outpost. He also pondered the meaning of this place not just to himself but to all of us, and



**Eric DeFonso in the Galapagos April, 2011.**

what the islands' legacy truly is. In this presentation he will share his excitement and curiosity about the natural and human history of the Galapagos, and its role in formulating what is often called "the greatest single idea anyone has ever had."

Eric DeFonso began bird-watching 18 years ago as a casual hobby, but his interest turned into a consuming passion. He has a master's degree in atmospheric science and worked in computing for several years before drastically changing course and following his love of birds wherever it

leads him. He is a certified Master Naturalist for the city of Fort Collins, served on the FCAS Board of Directors, and worked as a volunteer educational bird handler at the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program. In addition to photography, he also is an experienced bird-sound recordist, logging recordings of nearly 500 species.

Join us on Thursday, April 11 to view Eric's pictures and see the Galapagos! The program is free and the public is welcomed.

## President's Corner

by Joann Thomas

The Easter Bunny isn't the only thing hopping around Fort Collins. FCAS is moving on out!

John Shenot, our new field trip guru, has conjured up some great trips along with the sharing at our program meetings of great bird sightings. That



was fun and people were checking out locations from others to get that bird they don't have on their list yet.

For me, that's what Audubon was always about...the birds. It was only after I joined the board that I realized how much more there was to Audubon. I learned that the Audubon Society was founded to protect a Florida population of egrets whose feathers were being harvested for women's hats. One of the society's fundamental foundations is protection of habitat. And, here

in Colorado that is one of the primary goals of the Audubon Colorado Council, an organization of all 11 Audubon chapters in Colorado. Protection of wildlife habitat and the environment as a whole are their primary goals. Think about it—as an Audubon member, you are a part of the chorus of voices that echoes from the past. Become an active member of FCAS by hopping to it!

### Welcome New National Members

FCAS welcomes new National Audubon Society members by sending complimentary copies of our newsletter for one month. We invite you to join us at our monthly programs on the second Thursday of the month to find out more about FCAS. National dues do not cover the cost of printing and mailing the newsletter, so if you'd like to keep receiving the *Ptarmigan* after the complimentary issue, please support your local chapter and subscribe to the newsletter. See the details on the last page of the newsletter or on our website at [www.fortnet.org/Audubon](http://www.fortnet.org/Audubon).

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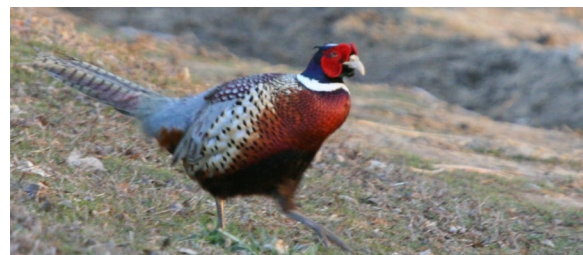
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Pheasant by Bill Miller.

### FCAS Pocket Guide to Local Birds

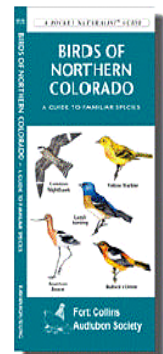
Is available at the following retailers who support our organization with the sales:

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3636 S. College Ave  
Ste. C  
(970) 225-2557

Jax Mercantile  
950 E. Eisenhower  
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1200 N. College  
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## New Study Finds Pesticides Leading Cause of Grassland Bird Declines

A new study led by a preeminent Canadian toxicologist identifies acutely toxic pesticides as the most likely leading cause of the widespread decline in grassland bird numbers in the United States, a finding that challenges the widely-held assumption that loss of habitat is the primary cause of those population declines.

The scientific assessment, which looked at data over a 23-year period—from 1980 to 2003—was published on Feb. 20, 2013 in PLOS One ([http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/toxins/Grassland\\_birds\\_PLOS\\_One\\_Feb\\_2013.pdf](http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/toxins/Grassland_birds_PLOS_One_Feb_2013.pdf)), an online peer-reviewed scientific journal. The study was conducted by Dr. Pierre Mineau, recently retired from Environment Canada, and Mélanie Whiteside of Health Canada.

The study looked at five potential causes of grassland bird declines besides lethal pesticide risk: change in cropped pasture such as hay or alfalfa production, farming intensity or the proportion of agricultural land that is actively cropped, herbicide use, overall insecticide use, and change in permanent pasture and range-

land.

“What this study suggests is that we need to start paying a lot more attention to the use of

pesticides if we want to reverse, halt, or simply slow the very significant downward trend in grassland bird populations. Our study put the spotlight on acutely toxic insecticides used in our cropland starting after the Second World War and persisting to this day—albeit at a lower level. The data suggest that loss of birds in agricultural fields is more than an



Horned Lark and chicks by Middleton Evans.

unfortunate consequence of pest control; it may drive bird populations to local extinction,” Mineau said.

Many grassland bird species have undergone range contractions or population declines in recent decades. In fact, analyses of North American birds indicate that these birds are declining faster than birds from other biomes. Habitat protection has long been considered a central pillar in efforts to stem the decline of grassland bird species, such as the Vesper Sparrow, the Ring-necked Pheasant, and the Horned Lark.

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## Outdoor Cats: Single Greatest Source of Human-Caused Mortality for Birds and Mammals

A new peer-reviewed study ([http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/pdf/Loss\\_et\\_al\\_2013.pdf](http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/pdf/Loss_et_al_2013.pdf)) published last January and authored by scientists from the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has found that bird and mammal mortality caused by outdoor cats is much higher than has been widely reported, with annual bird mortality now estimated to be 1.4 to 3.7 billion and mammal mortality likely 6.9 to 20.7 billion individuals.

The study, a comprehensive analysis of information on the issue of outdoor cat predation, is

based on a review of 90 previous studies. Dr. George Fenwick, President of American Bird Conservancy, said, “This study, which employed scientifically rigorous standards for data inclusion, demonstrates that the issue of cat predation on birds and mammals is an even bigger environmental and ecological threat than we thought. No estimates of any other anthropogenic mortality source approach the bird mortality this study calculated for cat predation.”

The study should put to rest that outdoor cats represent some harmless, new component to the

*Cats continued on Page 6*





## Upcoming Field Trips

*All field trips are free (unless otherwise noted) and open to the public. All experience levels are welcome. Bring snacks or lunch, water, binoculars, and spotting scopes. Visit [www.fortnet.org/Audubon](http://www.fortnet.org/Audubon) for more information.*

**April 12, Friday, “All A-Bird” to Riverbend Ponds.** Leader: John Shenot, [john-shenot@gmail.com](mailto:john-shenot@gmail.com), 970-682-2551. Meet at 5 p.m. at the parking lot on Prospect Road. People who work on weekends never get to go on all those great weekend field trips, so we’re going to try a Friday evening All A-Bird. This should be a good introduction to birding for beginners and a chance to play Bird-O (think bingo with bird species instead of numbers).

**April 14, Sunday, Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey.** Leader: Denise Bretting, [dbretting@swloveland.com](mailto:dbretting@swloveland.com), work: 970-669-1185, home: 970-669-8095. Call for any change. Meet at 7 a.m. in the parking lot. FCAS performs a monthly bird census for the city of Fort Collins. All levels are welcome.

**April 20 & 21, Saturday and Sunday, Colorado Birding Series Fundraising Trips: Ptarmigan Run.** Each day is a separate field trip. Leader: Christian Nunes. For more information or reservations, contact Nick Komar,

[quetzal65@comcast.net](mailto:quetzal65@comcast.net), 970-449-3645. FCAS has partnered with Quetzal Tours to presents these educational field trips as part of a Colorado Birding Series that allows you to learn from the experts while traveling through Colorado’s various life zones. Each trip is limited to five participants along with a leader and a driver. White-tailed Ptarmigan (our FCAS mascot) epitomize the tundra habitat of the Rocky Mountain Front Range. We will seek these secretive mountain chickens still in the snow-white plumage of winter near Brainard Lake in the Indian Peaks of Boulder County. Birding stops nearby will seek other mountain specialty species. Target Birds: White-tailed Ptarmigan, Three-toed Woodpecker, Red Crossbill, Evening and Pine Grosbeak,

Brown-capped Rosy-Finch. Cost and registration: \$80 for FCAS members, \$100 for non-members, due one week in advance. Proceeds benefit FCAS.

**April 27, Saturday, Chapungu Park at Centerra.** Leader: Connie Kogler, [zblueheron@gmail.com](mailto:zblueheron@gmail.com). Meet at 7:30 a.m. Park at the north end of the park. We’ll bird the park, then have coffee at the Barnes & Noble afterwards.

**April 28, Sunday, Sylvan Dale Guest Ranch.** Leader: Denise Bretting, [dbretting@swloveland.com](mailto:dbretting@swloveland.com), work: 970-669-1185, home: 970-669-8095. This trip starts at 9 a.m. and will take approximately three hours. Natu-

ralist Dave Armstrong will do an introduction. Expect easy walking over a short distance. This trip is limited to no more than 15 or 20 people. Advance RSVP is required. Directions, details about where to park, etc. will be provided.

**May 4 & 5, Saturday and Sunday, Colorado Birding Series Fundraising Trips:**

**Chico Basin Ranch.** Each day is a separate field trip. Leader: John Drummond. For more information or reservations, contact Nick Komar, [quetzal65@comcast.net](mailto:quetzal65@comcast.net), 970-449-3645. This is another in the educational field trip series offered by Quetzal Tours. Each trip is limited to five participants. Migrating passerine birds of the east and west mix together at Chico Basin Ranch, perhaps Colorado’s premier migration hot spot. This tour features a visit to Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory’s spring migration banding station where you will see birds in the hand. Target Birds: Flycatchers, vireos, warblers, tanagers. Cost and registration: \$80 for FCAS members, \$100 for non-members, due one week in advance. Proceeds benefit FCAS.



White-tailed Ptarmigan by Nick Komar.



## A Crissum???

With the large flocks of Cedar Waxwings and Bohemian Waxwings flying about Fort Collins lately, I decided an article about sorting these two relatives would be a great topic for the Education Corner.

I have Kevin Cook's dedication to teaching, not just about birds, but also about the correct use of language when labeling their anatomy, to thank for my knowledge.

So what is a crissum? Spell check can't even find the word! And according to Kevin, many editors of bird guides don't know it either! So let's



**Bohemian Waxwing crissum and tail feathers. File photo.**

begin. Check out the diagram in your bird guide that labels the parts of a bird's anatomy. In Peterson's *Western Birds*, it's called "Topography of a Bird." Learning the names of these parts aids in describing a bird to a fellow birder. It's specific and helpful, but the problem is different

books often use different labels.

In Peterson's guide, the under part of a bird's body at the tail is labeled "undertail coverts." The definition from <http://birding.about.com/od/Bird-Glossary-U-Z/g/Undertail-Coverts.htm> reads: "The short feathers under the base of a bird's tail. These feathers surround the cloaca (vent), the opening through which birds expel liquid and solid waste."

While this is true, the region of the body on which these undertail coverts exist is called the crissum. The color of the undertail coverts on the crissum is an important trait in separating species of birds for identification. Check out the waxwings in your field guide. In Peterson's they are positioned on one page and viewed from the front, from the side, and, especially important, from the underside. What color is the crissum on each

bird and why is this especially important to note on the waxwings?

As the flocks of waxwings pass in migration throughout Fort Collins, they usually swirl



**Bohemian Waxwing from Cornell Lab of Ornithology.**

around the tops of trees feeding on berries and seeds. When I watched them last week, they were in the top of a leafless cottonwood that was at least 20 or more feet tall. With your binoculars, what is the most obviously visible part of the bird? Yes, the underside. What is the color of the crissum? If you haven't added the Bohemian



**Bohemian Waxwing crissum in full view.**

Waxwing to your list, check out the large flocks, go from bird to bird, and pretty soon, you'll find one!

Please remember to provide us with any new email addresses. Otherwise you may not receive your electronic version of the Ptarmigan. Send changes to: [fortcollinsaudubonmember-ship@gmail.com](mailto:fortcollinsaudubonmember-ship@gmail.com).



## Ecuador Birding Excursion

This summer, join fellow Auduboners in Ecuador's Andean peaks and cloud forests. Quetzal Tours is offering an eight-day relaxed-pace birding adventure to Ecuador, led by the bilingual Ecuadorian birding guide, Xavier Muñoz. Not only will this be a unique experience at a low price (\$2000 per person), but the event also serves as a fundraiser as a portion of the proceeds will be donated to FCAS. Locations to be visited include Mindo, Nangaito, Papallacta Pass, and Guacamayos Pass. Birding highlights will include dozens of species



Dark-backed Wood-Quail by Nick Komar.

of brightly colored tanagers, hummingbirds, and, of course, quetzals, many of which can be seen at close range. Ecuador has the highest biodiversity in the world, hosting more bird species than any other country. The tour is limited to six in order to guarantee a quality, personalized experience. Add-on guided birding excursions to the Amazonian rainforests or the unique Galapagos Islands also can be arranged. For more information or to reserve your spot, contact Quetzal Tours, at [info@quetzal-tours.com](mailto:info@quetzal-tours.com), or call Nick Komar at 970-449-3645.

*Cats continued from Page 3*  
natural environment. The impact of outdoor cats is staggering and can no longer be ignored or dismissed. It is imperative that cat owners and communities get serious about this problem before even more ecological damage occurs.

This study's estimate of bird mortality exceeds by far any previously estimated U.S. figure for cats. The magnitude of mortality may exceed all other direct sources of anthropogenic bird and mammal mortality combined. Other bird mortality sources would include collisions with windows, buildings, communication towers, vehicles, and pesticide poisoning.

The median number of birds killed by cats annually is estimated to be 2.4 billion and the median number of mammals killed is estimated to be 12.3 billion. About 69 percent of the bird mortality from cat predation and 89 percent of the mammal mortality was from un-owned cats. Un-owned cats are defined to include farm/barn cats, strays that are fed but not granted access to human habitations, cats in subsidized colonies, and cats that are completely feral.



Cat with American Coot by Debi Shearwater.

Native species make up the majority of the birds preyed upon by cats. On average, only 33 percent of bird prey identified by species were non-native in 10 studies. Studies of mammals in suburban and rural areas found that 75–100 percent of mammalian prey were native mice, shrews, voles, squirrels, and rabbits, all of which serve as food sources for birds of prey such as hawks, owls, and eagles.

The study charges that, "Despite these harmful effects, policies for management of free-ranging cat populations and regulation of pet ownership behaviors are dictated by animal welfare issues rather than ecological impacts. Projects to manage free-ranging cats, such as trap-neuter-return colonies, are potentially harmful to wildlife populations, but are implemented across the United States without widespread public knowledge, consideration of scientific evidence, or the environmental review processes typically required for actions with harmful environmental consequences."

Reference: <http://www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/130129.html>





## Highlights of Recent FCAS Field Trips

*By John Shenot, Field Trip Coordinator*

February's Winter Owls fundraising trips were a big success in that they raised money for the chapter and some very special birds were observed. Participants had a great time and were



Star Jorgensen, Liz Pruessner, and Ron Maeda on the February 23 field trip in Old Town Fort Collins. Photo by John Shenot.

treated to stunning views of Long-eared Owls, a Short-eared Owl, and an Eastern Screech-Owl. A Great Horned Owl also was observed. As expected, the "All A-Bird" field trip in Old Town Fort Collins encountered mostly common birds, but Common Redpolls were still present at the Museum of Discovery and five duck species were seen at Udall Natural Area.

## Save the Date! (Future Field Trips)

*Mark your calendars! The following field trips have been scheduled for future months. Details will appear in future newsletters and on the FCAS website. Fundraising trips are space limited and cost \$80 for Chapter members, \$100 for non-members. All other trips are free.*

**May 11**, 6:30 a.m., Falcon Ridge.

**May 12**, 7 a.m., Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey.

**June 9**, 6:30 a.m., Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey.

**June 15 & 16**, time TBD, Rocky Mountain Chorus Fundraising Trips led by Quetzal Tours.

**June 22**, 8 a.m., Rocky Mountain National Park Birds & Butterflies.

**June 23**, 6 a.m., Pawnee National Grasslands.

**July 14**, 6:30 a.m., Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey.

**July 20 & 21**, time TBD, High Plains of North Park Fundraising Trips led by Quetzal Tours.

**Aug. 11**, 6:30 a.m., Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey.

**Aug. 24**, 8 a.m., Sylvan Dale Guest Ranch.

**Sept. 8**, 6:30 a.m., Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey.



## FCAS Welcomes New and Renewing Members

Al Trask  
Rick Anderson  
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